

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE B-16

NEW YORK TIMES
22 FEBRUARY 1980

C.I.A. Head Opposes Prior Notice of Covert Operations

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 21—Adm. Stansfield Turner, the Director of Central Intelligence, told senators today that the Carter Administration strongly opposed a proposal requiring that some members of Congress be given prior notice of all covert intelligence operations.

And, to the surprise of some members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Admiral Turner testified that it was "not correct" that at least a few committee members had been informed of all clandestine operations since 1977.

It did not seem entirely clear whether Admiral Turner meant that knowledge of some operations had been completely withheld from members of the committee or only that the information had been withheld until after the operation was completed. He declined to answer questions from reporters seeking clarification.

Admiral Turner also told the committee that, at his confirmation hearing in 1977, he said only that he would try to comply with a Senate resolution that requests prior notification of clandestine activities, adding that he did not mean "that I was sure I could comply with it."

'Drawing a Very Fine Line'

The disclosure came after questioning by Senator Walter D. Huddleston, Democrat of Kentucky, who expressed what appeared to be a general conviction that the Central Intelligence Agency had been giving the committee prior notice of clandestine operations. In one undisclosed ex-

ception, the Senator added, at least some members of the committee were given prior notice.

"That is not correct," Admiral Turner said. Later, he said he had never been ordered to withhold information from the intelligence committees but added, "We are drawing a very fine line here. Timing is a delicate issue in some instances."

"Requiring full and prior Congressional access to intelligence information," the Director said, "will have an inhibiting effect upon the willingness of individuals and organizations to cooperate with our country."

Admiral Turner's testimony reflects the major issue dividing the Carter Administration and Senate authors of pro-

posed national intelligence legislation designed to serve as a "charter" for the nation's intelligence agencies.

The proposed law, introduced by Senator Huddleston and Senator Charles McC. Mathias Jr., Republican of Maryland, would generally require prior notification to the full intelligence committees. In an emergency, notification could be limited for the first 48 hours to the two senior members from each party on each committee and to the majority and minority leaders of the Senate and the House.

Provision Called 'Unwise'

Admiral Turner testified that he and President Carter believed this provision was "unnecessary, improper and unwise," and urged that the wording of the present law be retained. This requires reporting of covert operations "in a timely fashion," which, in some cases, has been construed by the C.I.A. to permit informing Congress after the fact.

In another potentially controversial part of his testimony, Admiral Turner said, "Activities which would have long-term consequences, or which would be carried out over an extended period of time, should generally be shared with Congress at their inception." But he added that he did not wish this written into law.

The chairman of the intelligence committee, Senator Birch Bayh, Democrat of Indiana, said he was disturbed that Admiral Turner wished to use the modifying word "generally" and that the director did not want prior notification in the "bedrock" of statute law.

Admiral Turner said the Administration generally favored most provisions of the Huddleston charter bill, but he expressed opposition to eight different features of it. This surprised several senators who had believed that agreement with the Administration had been reached on all but two issues.

One issue was prior notification, and the other was prohibition of the intelligence agency's attempts to infiltrate the press, the clergy and academic institutions with undercover agents.

"There can arise unique circumstances in which intelligence relationships with members of these institutions may be the only means available for accomplishing important intelligence objectives," Admiral Turner said.

The committee is expected to hold sporadic hearings until April 1, and will then attempt to write a bill to be sent to the Senate.